

C I R C U L A R .

TO THE WARDENS AND MEMBERS OF THE SEVERAL COUNTY COUNCILS IN CANADA WEST:

GENTLEMEN:

Permit me, now that public improvement has become the order of the day,—to call your attention to a scheme, which I have lately had the honor to bring under the notice of the Government, for the sale and settlement of the Waste Lands of the Crown, in Western Canada.

There are, I believe, few persons in Upper Canada, at all conversant with public matters, who will not readily admit that some improvement upon the present system of disposing of the public Lands, might not with safety be adopted; as a proof of the necessity of change, I have only to call your attention to the great number of active and intelligent young men who are annually leaving Canada, and good Lands,—to settle in the far west, further from market, upon lands often of an inferior quality, and in a Country, and climate, in no way surpassing, if equal, to our own,—purely on account of difficulties which I conceive might long since have been removed, without in the least lessening the revenue derived from this source.

To the speculator and capitalist, the present, is perhaps the best system that could be devised,—but to the poor, the actual settler, undoubtedly the very worst,—how permit me to ask, is he to pay down for his land,—even though he got it at one third of its value,—or of what value in five cases out of six would an hundred acres of land, be to him twenty or thirty miles from a market, in rear of hundreds of acres of uncultivated lands, held by absentees and speculators, without roads to reach it,—other than such as he may be able to make with his own labour? and how many instances might be given of industrious and well conducted Emigrants who, having settled in the more remote parts of the Country, have for years struggled against poverty and privations, who might, with the assistance of even a tolerable road, been comparatively independent.

The question then arises,—is there no remedy for his evil? That no such remedy has yet been found in the various schemes heretofore promulgated, must be admitted. It is true that large sums of money have been expended in bringing out settlers from various parts of the mother Country, to whom free grants of lands were made, and provisions supplied, but without producing the desired result. The plan of making free grants upon condition of settlement, has also proved itself as great a failure as the first, and there can be little hope that the more recent, though not less absurd scheme of reducing the price of Crown Lands, will be attended with any better effect. On the contrary, such a plan would have a tendency to open the door of speculation wider than ever, and compel the actual settler to purchase his lands secondhand, and at enormously high prices. Such have been, and doubtless will continue to be, the effects of the system we complain of; a system which has driven from us hundreds of our most enterprising young men, and prevented thousands of industrious and valuable emigrants from settling amongst us.

To remedy this long standing and universally acknowledged evil, is, in my opinion, a work worthy of the united effort of a Government and a people.

If the following, therefore, should be found to contain a single suggestion which would, in the slightest degree, promote the interests of this my native country, by placing this important part of our Colonial Government upon a better footing, I should consider myself amply repaid for all the labour which its preparation may have caused.

The plan I have to suggest, is,—That the Government should dispose of all the waste, or unsold Lands of the Crown, to the several County Councils, where such lands may lie, at a nominal price of say 6d. or 1s. per acre,—payment for the same to be made by the Councils in Debentures, bearing interest, and redeemable in 30 years. The fund so created to be applied towards the establishment of a permanent "Common School" fund. The conditions of the sale to the Counties to be,—that these Lands shall be by them re-sold, at a low price, varying from 2s. 6d. to 7s. 6d. per acre, according to value,—and on time if the purchasers require it,—to actual settlers only. The entire proceeds of such sales after providing for the payment of the interest upon the purchase, and any incidental expenses, to be anticipated by Debentures and laid out in making Roads thereto.

The advantages of the scheme are, I conceive

First,—The making of good roads throughout the most remote parts of your several Counties.

Secondly,—The immediate and consequent settlement of the same, and

Thirdly,—The creation of a permanent Common School Fund; three things of vital importance to the people of this Province, and if attainable, as I contend they are, and that too, without creating one shilling of additional tax, would be productive of incalculable good. Without roads and suitable means of communication, no country can very speedily be settled; and without schools, no people are likely to become intelligent, great or prosperous.

The question has been asked, will the Government do it? Most certainly, if the people desire it,—why not? Is there any one among us who does not believe that the chief aim and object of any Government should be in disposing of the public lands of the Crown, to have them pass directly into the hands of the actual settler, and that every family settled in a new Township is worth more to the Government than a thousand acres of unproductive land.

I am aware that many of the Counties do not contain a sufficient quantity of land, now at the disposal of the Crown, to make it an object for the Councils to undertake their management; though in a majority of them the quantity is still large. In this county, which is by no means the best, a sum exceeding Thirty thousand pounds could be raised for road purposes alone,—an amount sufficient to make nearly four hundred miles of as good road as any country could desire.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

W. S. CONGER, Sheriff, C. P.

Sheriff's Office, Peterborough, 24th February, 1851